

The Nuclear Issue: Pugwash and the Bush Policies*

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This paper is mainly concerned with the nuclear issue, specifically with the dangers to the world that may arise from the nuclear policies of the George W. Bush Administration. But in order to put these policies into a proper perspective, I have to start with observations on the general doctrines and strategies of this Administration.

I should declare, from the start, that I am strongly critical of the present US Administration in its conduct of world affairs. In the highly charged political climate of the recent months – largely related to the Iraq debacle – anyone criticizing the Bush Administration has immediately been branded as anti-American, and placed in the defensive position of having to begin with a statement that one is not anti-American.

So let me say this clearly: I am not anti-American. On the contrary, I submit that it is the policies of the current Administration that should be called anti-American, because – in my opinion – they do not represent the views of the majority of the American people. I am convinced that these policies would not have been pursued if Al Gore had won the election in 2000. You will remember that – even with the distraction of Ralph Nader – Al Gore had a majority in the national vote, and it was only through some questionable manoeuvres that he was deprived of the Presidency. It seems to me very unlikely that, had he been elected, Al Gore would have alienated so many to such an extent.

It is important to note that the current polarization of the world is largely the consequence of the Bush slogan: “You are either with us or against us”. This was initially applied to the campaign against al-Qaeda, but it puts all those who do not fully agree with the Bush policies into the category of villains. There are many, perhaps a majority in the world, who are strongly against terrorists, and ready to join in actions against them, but are not happy with the Bush policies. These policies are seen by many outside the United States as aiming at establishing a US hegemony in the world, and treating international undertakings with contempt, to be adhered to only if they suit the interest of the United States.

What I find so repugnant about these policies is their blatant hypocrisy. The USA proclaims itself as the champion of democracy in the world, while actually imposing its will in a dictatorial manner. It is supposed to uphold the rules of law, yet violates legal commitments under international treaties. It castigates members of the United Nations for exercising their rights under existing rules but takes military action against a member state without the authority of the United Nations.

A central criticism of the United Nations made by the Bush team is that it is ineffective, a useless and enfeebled organ, incapable of taking decisive action. This sort of criticism has traditionally been leveled at democracies by totalitarian regimes. Long discussions and protracted negotiations are an inherent feature of a democratic system, in which the needs and aspirations of many groups or nations have to be reconciled in a peaceful manner. The Bush Administration has no truck with such approaches, even though it professes to champion democracy.

In my view, such policies are unacceptable in a civilized society because in the long run, they would spell the ruin of civilization.

The pursuit of these policies was evident in the campaign against Iraq. The stated justification was to disarm Iraq of weapons of mass destruction, but others see it primarily as an attempt to increase the US influence in the Middle East. There is plenty of documentary evidence to support the thesis that the main reason for bringing down the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq – and making similar threats against Syria and Iran – was to change the political configuration in the Middle East so as to give the United States political, economic and military control of that region.

The history of these endeavours, is now general knowledge, but I want to recall some salient points.

Even during the Cold War years, various right wing groups in the United States – who have become known as neo-conservatives – advocated strong aggressive foreign policies. These groups had considerable sway during the Reagan Presidency, but it was after the end of the Cold War – and the outcome of the first Gulf War, which they saw as having left the business unfinished – that they became really active. In the spring of 1992 a document was produced, called Defense Policy Guidance, which was stunning in the clarity and ambition of its vision of a new US foreign and military policy. It called for US dominance by preventing the rise of any potentially hostile power, and for a policy of pre-emptive military action against states suspected of developing weapons of mass destruction. The document was written by two relatively unknown functionaries in the Pentagon's policy department. They were Paul Wolfowitz and Lewis Libby; their boss at the time was Dick Cheney, then Secretary for Defense. All three are now prominent members of the Bush Administration.

In July 1996, the Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies issued a document entitled "A Clean Break: a New Strategy for Securing the Realm". The head of the Institute was Richard Perle – for years known as the Prince of Darkness, for his extreme views, and strong support of the Israel lobby. The document called on the then Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, to adopt a radical change in policy, starting with a repudiation of the Oslo Accords, and to be followed by a campaign to eliminate Saddam Hussein and destabilize the governments of Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Iran.

In February 1998, Richard Perle wrote an Open Letter to President Clinton, demanding a full-scale drive for a regime change in Baghdad. It had 25 signatories, including many who are now in the Bush Administration, e.g.: Donald Rumsfeld--now Defense Secretary, and Paul Wolfowitz – now Deputy Defense Secretary.

The al-Qaeda attack of September 11 provided the opportunity for these policies to be put into practice. The case for a Pax Americana had been set out, and its first stage was implemented in the war against Iraq.

The prolonged squabbles over UN Resolutions and inspections, aiming at giving legitimacy to the war, seem to have been just a charade, intended to create the impression that it was not the USA alone but a coalition that was involved in the anti-Iraq campaign. The decision to overthrow the Saddam Hussein regime having been taken much earlier, it was only the time for its implementation that had to be chosen. This was probably dictated not by the outcome of the Hans Blix inspections, but by the need to assemble the necessary military strength.

The military strength of the USA is truly awesome. Since the end of the Cold War, the Americans have built up an enormous military potential. Making use of the latest advances in science and the achievements in technology – and supported by budgets of astronomical dimensions – the United States has become the greatest military power that ever existed; nearly exceeding in sophistication all other nations combined. Against this might, the Iraqi army, with antiquated tanks and no air-power to provide cover, did not stand a chance.

Of course, the fact that Saddam Hussein's regime was rotten, and was kept from falling apart entirely by the terror imposed by a small number of thugs, contributed to its rapid demise. The claim by Rumsfeld et al that Iraq posed a threat to other nations, including the United States, was just laughable.

Indeed, the official reason for the military attack on Iraq – the removal of weapons of mass destruction – has proven to be completely indefensible, since no such weapons have so far been found, despite the intense search carried out by large groups of experts appointed by the USA. As time goes on, and the WMDs are not found, there will be an attempt to play down the importance of finding them, but this will not alter the fact that the war was started on false premises.

All the same, it would be hypocritical for those of us who were against the war not to rejoice over the downfall of a tyrannical regime, and not to admit that this would not have come about so quickly without military intervention. But the price we paid for this is far too high: it has reinstated in world affairs the old maxim that the ends justify the means.

The events of the recent months are a severe setback to those who believe that morality and adherence to the rules of law should be our guiding principles. For the time being, the rule seems to be: might is right, and in submitting to this rule, the governments of many countries may be driven to adopt a pragmatic policy; they may be forced to

acknowledge that there is now a single superpower; they may feel obliged to accept the role of the United States as the world's policeman.

But this cannot be a permanent solution. Even if the Americans were less arrogant in pursuing that role than they are now, a system with a built-in inequality is bound to be unstable. It is bound to create resentment, a resentment that will find expression in various ways, including an increase in international terrorism. This in turn will force the "policemen" to take countermeasures, which will make the inequality even more acute. Democracy in the world, as we know it today, would be ended.

This is a possible scenario, but it need not happen. My main hope is that the opposition to it will come from within the United States itself. At present, Bush is very popular and carries a majority of public opinion: this is the usual wave of patriotism which comes with a military victory, but it is already decreasing significantly. I believe that the strong anti-war demonstrations that we saw earlier are a true reflection of the views of the majority of the American people. Somehow, I do not see the American people accepting the role assigned to them by the clique that has hijacked the Administration. Public opinion is bound to turn when the dangers associated with the current policies become apparent. My main worry is that in the meantime these dangers may lead to catastrophic results. The greatest dangers derive from the nuclear doctrines pursued by the Bush Administration.

These new doctrines have been comprehensively analysed by Steven Miller in a paper, "Skepticism Triumphant", an updated version of a presentation he made at the Pugwash conference in Agra last year. He contrasts the views of the "Skeptics", by which he means the Bush Administration, against those of the arms controllers. His conclusion is that arms control is dead.

This conclusion is probably correct, but it does not follow from this that we have to accept fatalistically the new doctrines. Arms control and unilateral policies are not the only options. In his paper, Steven Miller was mainly concerned with contrasting these two, and therefore he left out from consideration another alternative to arms control, namely, nuclear disarmament.

In Pugwash we faced, from the beginning, the dilemma of the two approaches: arms control versus disarmament. A few years ago we spent much time, in the Council and in special workshops, discussing the pros and cons of the two approaches.

This dispute has now been brought to an end by the entry onto the scene of the new approach. Arms control is now dead. But, as discussed earlier, the policy of the Bush Administration, envisaging US world dominance, is unacceptable. I submit that this leaves only one option for Pugwash: to pursue nuclear disarmament.

The elimination of nuclear weapons has always been the goal of Pugwash, following the call in the Russell-Einstein Manifesto. We have pursued this goal for moral reasons, because ethical issues have always played a major role in Pugwash: any use of nuclear weapons has been seen as immoral. But we have also seen in our goals a basic purpose: survival. Any use of nuclear weapons would carry the danger of escalation and a threat to our continued existence.

But the use of nuclear weapons is explicitly contemplated in the policies of the Bush Administration.

These policies have been promulgated in a number of statements, most of them made during the last year. The following documents are of particular importance:

- Nuclear Posture Review. January, 2002
- The National Security Strategy of the United States of America. September, 2002
- National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction. December 2002
- National Policy on Ballistic Missile Defense. May 2003

These policies seem to have two aims: one, a defensive strategy to make the USA invulnerable to an attack from outside; the second, an offensive strategy, to threaten an unfriendly regime with military action, including the use of nuclear weapons, if it attempts to acquire WMDs for itself.

For the first purpose, the decision was made to give a high priority to missile defence. As a first step, the USA abrogated the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, which had been previously considered the bedrock of the arms control system. A hugely increased budget has been provided for a missile defence project, which is said to be essential in a world of potential threats from weapons of mass destruction.

But it is in the offensive aspect that the biggest changes have occurred. The new Nuclear Posture Review spells out a strategy which incorporates nuclear capability into conventional war planning. The previous doctrine of deterrence, by which the actual use of nuclear weapons was seen as a last resort, when everything else had failed, has been thrown overboard. In the new doctrine, nuclear weapons have become a standard part of military strategy; they would be used in a conflict just like any other explosives. This represents a major shift in the whole rationale for nuclear weapons.

The main reason for this change seems to be the fear that states seen as unfriendly to the USA may acquire weapons of mass destruction: "We will not permit the world's most dangerous regimes and terrorists to threaten us with the world's most destructive weapons".

In this pursuit, the Bush Administration is prepared to go very far, including pre-emptive strikes: "We must be prepared to stop rogue states and their terrorist clients before they are able to threaten or use weapons of mass destruction against the United States and our allies and friends." And it goes on: "To forestall or prevent such hostile acts by our adversaries, the United States will, if necessary, act pre-emptively."

The implementation of this policy has already begun. The United States is designing a new nuclear warhead of low yield, but with a shape that would give it a very high penetrating power into concrete, the "robust nuclear earth penetrator". It is intended to destroy bunkers with thick concrete walls in which weapons of mass destruction may be stored, or enemy leaders may seek shelter.

To enable this project to go ahead the US Senate has already decided to rescind the long-standing prohibition on the development of low yield nuclear weapons. Other types of warheads are also contemplated.

The new weapons will have to be tested. At present there is a treaty prohibiting the testing of nuclear weapons (except in sub-critical assemblies), the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which the United States has signed but not ratified. Given the contempt of the Bush Administration for international treaties, little excuse would be needed to authorize the testing of the new weapon. Indeed, the need to resume testing is now openly advocated.

If the USA resumed testing, this would be a signal to other nuclear weapon states to do the same. China would be almost certain to resume testing. After the US decision to develop ballistic missile defences, China feels vulnerable, and is likely to attempt to reduce its vulnerability by modernizing and enlarging its nuclear arsenal. An opinion is building up that: "China should realize that the present minimum nuclear arsenal is inadequate to meet the new challenges, and therefore should greatly expand its nuclear force to the extent that it can be actually used in different scenarios". At present this is a minority view, but it may become significant should the USA resume testing. Other states with nuclear weapons, such as India or Pakistan, might use the window of opportunity opened by the USA to update their arsenals. The danger of a new nuclear arms race is real.

Another worry about the development of the new bomb is that it would blur the distinction between nuclear and conventional weapons. The chief characteristic of a nuclear weapon is its enormous destructive power, unique even in comparison with current chemical or biological weaponry, also designated as weapons of mass destruction. This has resulted in a taboo on the use of nuclear weapons in combat, a taboo that has held out since Nagasaki. But if at one end of the spectrum a nuclear bomb can be manufactured which does not differ quantitatively from ordinary explosives, then the qualitative difference will also disappear; the nuclear threshold will be crossed, and nuclear weapons will gradually come to be seen as a tool of war, even though the danger they present to the existence of the human race will remain.

For the USA, the distinction between nuclear and conventional weapons has already been eroded, as was made clear in the Nuclear Posture Review, but the situation has become even more threatening with the additional disposition to act pre-emptively.

The danger of this policy can hardly be over-emphasized. If the militarily mightiest country declares its readiness to carry out a pre-emptive use of nuclear weapons, others may soon follow. The Kashmir crisis, in May last year, is a stark warning of the reality of the nuclear peril.

India's declared policy is not to be the first to use nuclear weapons. But if the United States-whose nuclear policies are largely followed by India-makes a pre-emptive nuclear use part of its doctrine, this would give India the legitimacy to similarly threaten pre-emptive action against Pakistan. George Fernandes, India's Minister for Defence, said recently: India had "a much better case to go for pre-emptive action against Pakistan than the United States has in Iraq." More likely perhaps is that Pakistan would carry this out first.

Taiwan presents another potential scenario for a pre-emptive nuclear strike by the United States. Should the Taiwan authorities decide to declare independence, this would inevitably result in an attempted military invasion by mainland China. The USA, which is committed to the defence of Taiwan, may then opt for a pre-emptive strike.

And we still have the problem of North Korea, described by Bush as one of the "axis of evil". Under the Bush dictum not to allow the possession of weapons of mass destruction by any state considered to be hostile, North Korea will be called upon to close down all work on nuclear weapons. It is by no means certain that Kim Jong Il will submit to these demands, and a critical situation may arise in that part of the world.

A major worry in this respect are developments in Japan. So far Japan has been kept out of the nuclear weapons club by Article 9 of its constitution: "...the Japanese people forever renounce...the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes."

However, partly at the urging of the USA, strong tendencies are now appearing-with the backing of the Prime Minister, Junichiro Koizumi-to revise the constitution so as to make it legal for Japan to become a nuclear-weapon state.

Altogether, the aggressive policy of the United States, under the Bush Administration, has created a precarious situation in world affairs, with a greatly increased danger of nuclear weapons being used in combat.

Moreover, if the use of nuclear weapons is made legal, it would preclude passing of laws to prevent the development of new types of weapons, with even greater destructive potential than current WMDs-a truly horrifying prospect. Sir Martin Rees, the British Astronomer Royal, gives civilization a 50/50 chance of surviving this century. Others believe that this is optimistic.

What should be the Pugwash stand on this matter? Does the new situation call for a corresponding change in our activities?

Let me first state that I fully support the efforts made by the Secretary-General towards the resolution of local conflicts, particularly in the Middle East. His success in bringing together personalities from opposing camps encourages us to continue these activities; they may prevent a regional crisis from getting out of control.

But it is the central issue that I am concerned about. A year ago, in La Jolla, we have adopted the Goals of Pugwash for the next five years. The relevant document states: "Pugwash is strongly committed to the goal of abolishing all nuclear weapons. It is imperative that Pugwash constantly remind the international community of the immorality, illegality, and peril inherent in nuclear weapons, and to propose concrete steps towards their elimination." In the second year of the Quinquennium it is high time to take these steps.

Any attempt to achieve our goals by persuading the Bush Administration to change its policies through logical persuasion, or by appealing to moral instincts, would be hopeless and a complete waste of time. But it may not be a waste of time if such an appeal is made to the general public. As I said earlier, hope lies in a change of public opinion, particularly in the United States, to rise in opposition to the current policies, and throw them out in the process usually employed in democratic countries, namely, in free elections. Therefore, my suggestion is that the Pugwash effort should be towards an acceleration of that process in a campaign to influence public opinion, a campaign based on principles of morality and equity.

The immorality in the use of nuclear weapons is taken for granted, but this aspect is very seldom raised when calling for nuclear disarmament. We are told that a campaign based on moral principles is a non-starter, and we are afraid of appearing naïve, and divorced from reality. I see in the use of this argument evidence that we have allowed ethical considerations to be ignored for far too long. We are accused of not being realistic, when what we are trying to do is to prevent real dangers, the dangers that would result from the current policies of the Bush Administration.

The public at large is ignorant about these dangers and we urgently need a campaign of public education.

The other basic principle is adherence to international law. It is a *sine qua non* of a civilized society that nations fulfil their legal obligations and respect international law. World peace cannot be achieved without adherence to international treaties.

There is much deliberate obfuscation and brainwashing in this respect. Let me illustrate this with the example which happens to be at the heart of the problem, the problem of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Pugwash was very much involved in this treaty, in its earliest years, when we saw it as an important measure towards the elimination of nuclear weapons. Let me recall the salient facts about the NPT, to which 98 percent of nations have subscribed. In accordance with the treaty, all non-nuclear states that signed it undertook not to acquire nuclear weapons in any way. At the same time, the five states which officially possessed those weapons-by virtue of the fact that they had tested them by a certain date-undertook to get rid of theirs. The relevant Article VI reads: "Each of the Parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control"

By signing and ratifying the NPT, the nuclear member states are legally committed to nuclear disarmament. The hawks in those states, in an attempt to retain nuclear weapons, utilized an ambiguity in Article VI, which makes it appear that nuclear disarmament is linked with the achievement of general and complete disarmament. But the NPT Review Conference-an official part of the implementation of the NPT-at its session in 2000, removed this ambiguity in a statement issued by all five nuclear weapons states. It contains the following:

"...an unequivocal undertaking by the nuclear-weapon states to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals leading to nuclear disarmament to which all States Parties are committed under Article VI."

This makes the situation perfectly clear. The Bush policy, which is based on the continued existence (and use) of nuclear weapons, is in direct contradiction to the legally binding NPT.

But the Bush Administration seems to have managed to convince the public that only a part of the NPT, the part that applies to the non-nuclear states, is valid, and that therefore states which violate it-as Iran now stands accused of doing-must be punished for the transgression. The part concerning the obligation of the nuclear states is deliberately being obliterated. Let me cite two items which recently appeared in British national newspapers: "At a meeting of the IAEA today, the US will urge it to declare Tehran in breach of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The treaty seeks to confine nuclear weapons to Russia, Britain, France, China and America."

I have emphasized the second sentence because it displays the complete reversal of the purpose of the NPT.

The other newspaper-none other than The Times-reports similarly: "It [the NPT] was established to stop the spread of nuclear weapons beyond the original declared nuclear powers of the US, China, Russia, the UK and France."

There is no mention of the obligation of the latter.

We are being told all the time how dangerous nuclear weapons are and that they must not be allowed to fall into the hands of undesirable elements or rogue regimes: "Weapons of mass destruction ... nuclear, biological, and chemical – in the possession of hostile states and terrorists, represent one of the greatest security challenges facing the United States."

What we are not being told is that these weapons are just as dangerous in the possession of friendly nations. We are not being reminded that – with the realization of these dangers – even the United States has undertaken to get rid of its own nuclear arsenal. We are facing here a basic issue in which the ethical and legal aspects are intertwined. The

use of nuclear weapons is seen by the great majority of people in the world as immoral, due to their indiscriminate nature and unprecedented destructive power. Their possession – and therefore likely use – is thus equally unacceptable, whether by “rogue” or benevolent regimes.

The elimination of nuclear weapons has been the declared aim of the United Nations from the beginning, and resolutions to this effect are passed, year after year, by large majorities of the General Assembly. These resolutions are ignored by the nuclear weapon states, as are all attempts to discuss the issue by the organ set up for this purpose, the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva.

There is a need to keep hammering home the point that America’s stand on the NPT issue is iniquitous. It has signed and ratified an international treaty which commits it to get rid of nuclear weapons, yet it is pursuing a policy which demands the indefinite retention of these weapons.

We have to keep on highlighting the fundamental inconsistency in the US policies. The USA must make a choice: if it wants to keep nuclear weapons, then it should withdraw from the NPT (which would probably result in a massive increase in the number of nuclear weapon states). Otherwise, it must abide by the terms of the NPT and get rid of its nuclear arsenals. *Tertium non datur*. There is no third way.

I believe that a campaign to educate and influence public opinion, centered on the issue of the NPT, would stand a good chance of being successful.

The task of influencing public opinion is far too big for an organization like Pugwash to undertake by itself. Collaboration with other organizations would be essential. This would go against our traditional *modus vivendi*; Puwash has often been accused – perhaps justifiably – of being an exclusive club. But even if our mode of work has been justified in the past, I believe that the time has come to open up. I am not advocating that Pugwash should become a mass movement; what I am suggesting is that we should be more willing to collaborate with other organizations in the sense of spearheading a large effort to provide information to the general public. Pugwash is a movement of scientists, but the job of the scientist is not only to do original research; education is an essential element of it. And this is in essence what I propose.

An initiative in this direction has already been started by the British Pugwash Group. In setting up a “Nuclear Weapons Awareness Project”, the British Pugwash Group is collaborating with about a dozen other British organizations, ranging from BASIC (the British American Security Information Council) to MEDACT (Medical Action), from CND to Greenpeace. An account of this Project is presented by John Finney in paper submitted to this Conference. I suggest that the Pugwash Council should take it up and find ways to implement it on an international scale.

Let me now conclude with some simple observations of a more general nature, but relevant to the problems I have raised in this paper.

I believe in the inherent goodness of Man. What would be the point of keeping the human species if this were not true! But then our task must be to ensure that this belief gains general acceptance.

We still conduct world affairs on the outdated principle that our survival demands being militarily strong. This is a remnant of our early history, when Man had to resort to violence in order to survive or to ensure continuation of the species. It completely ignores the radical changes that have occurred as a result of the advances in science and technology, changes which make such a stand no longer necessary. If equitably distributed, our resources could be sufficient to meet the basic needs of the world population, despite its huge increase.

Moreover, thanks largely to the fantastic progress in technology, our world is becoming more and more interdependent, more and more transparent, more and more interactive. Inherent in these developments is a set of agreements, ranging from confidence-building measures to formal international treaties; from protection of the environment to the clearance of mine fields; from Interpol to the International Criminal Court; from ensuring intellectual property rights to the Declaration of Human Rights. Respect for, and strict adherence to, the terms of international agreements are at the basis of a civilized society. Without this, anarchy and terrorism would reign, the very perils President Bush is allegedly committed to eradicate. While he intends to tackle this issue by military means, we must strive to achieve it by peaceful means. While the Bush Administration plans to act unilaterally, we

have to ensure that world security is entrusted to the United Nations, the institution set up for this purpose. And we must link our respect for the law with strong moral principles.

Many of you are professional people, trained to look at problems in a detached, realistic, non-sentimental approach. But we are all, primarily, human beings, anxious to provide security for our nearest and dearest, and peace for fellow citizens of our nation and the world. We want to see a world in which relations between people and between nations are based on compassion, not greed; on generosity, not jealousy; on persuasion, not force; on equity, not oppression.

These are simple, some will say romantic, sentiments, but they are also realistic necessities. In a world armed with weapons of mass destruction, the use of which might bring the whole of civilization to an end, we cannot afford a polarized community, with its inherent threat of military confrontations. In this technological age, a global, equitable community, to which we all belong as world citizens, has become a vital necessity.